

- 5) *We should think that the Three Jewels are unique because in a universe of a billion world systems, there is only one [founding] Buddha*

According to Abhidharma cosmology, a universe is made of a *great thousand world systems*. One world system constitutes Mount Meru, the four continents, the seven mountains, sun, moon, and so forth. Multiplying such a world systems by one thousand equals a *small thousand worlds*. Multiplying a *small thousand worlds* by one thousand equals one *medium thousand worlds*, and multiplying a *medium thousand worlds* by one thousand equals one *great thousand worlds*. Therefore, a universe, such as our universe, is made of one *great thousand worlds*, that is, of one billion world systems. These billion world systems sequentially come into existence, remain, and are destroyed at the same time. Furthermore, during the existence of a universe, a Buddha appears only in one of its billion worlds to perform the twelve enlightened deeds; it is not possible for two Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma simultaneously in two different world systems belonging to a single universe. Therefore, the Three Jewels are unique in a universe of a billion world systems.

- 6) *We should think that the Three Jewels are the foundation of all mundane and supramundane qualities*  
All spiritual attainments arise in dependence on the Three Jewels. Realization of the four Noble Truths, the Four Seals, emptiness, etc., the generation of love, compassion, patience, blissful states of mind, and so forth, are all the results of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.  
And even worldly positive qualities arise in dependence on the Three Jewels, for, as explained, before, any positive action we engage in is the result of the enlightened activities of the Buddhas.

This completes the presentation of the six attitudes for making offerings. Even though whenever we make an offering we may not be able to extensively bring to mind these six attitudes, we may be able to go over them at least briefly. Being able to briefly go over them primarily depends on having previously gained familiarity with them. Hence, while we contemplate and meditate on refuge we should also make an effort to become familiar with these attitudes.

Therefore, in brief, there is nothing more important, more valuable, and more precious than the Three Jewels, and if we make offerings with this in mind we can accumulate vast stores of merit.

Lama Tsongkhapa continues his explanation by advising us to make offerings on special auspicious days when the merit of any positive action is said to be much greater than on any ordinary day.

Furthermore, since we have to eat and drink several times a day, we can transform that mundane activity with little effort into a daily Dharma practice by offering the first portion of the food and drink to the Three Jewels.

However, even though the practice of offering our food and drink is extremely beneficial, we should be cautious and mindful to offer the best part of our food, and remove the parts that are mouldy, wilted, etc.

The great Kadampa Geshe Sharawa says:

*Do not offer things such as mouldy sweet cheese and yellowed leaves, but use what you have that is good. Offering the first portion is not beneficial if it is done like the clearing away of some dust.*

Here the sweet cheese Geshe Sharawa describes is a Tibetan delicacy called *thu* which is made by mixing cream with a little sugar until it becomes a hardened cheesecake. Then it is salted, covered with a sheepskin, and left to dry. Since sometimes it is stored that way for a long time the outside of the cheese might become mouldy while the inside is still edible. Therefore, Geshe Sharawa says that one should scrape off the mouldy parts before offering *thu*, and remove the yellowed, wilted leaves of, for instance, vegetables, herbs or tea leaves before offering those.

Geshe Sharawa also criticizes a common practice of some people who mimic the actions of accomplished Lamas by flicking a drop of tea with their fingers when they offer it. Since they do not understand this gesture which yogis perform as part of a Tantric ritual it appears as if these people are clearing away some dust from their tea.

Also, a Sutra says:

*For example, it will not work just to put seeds on a fertile field without actually planting them in season. So it is appropriate continuously to plant the seeds of temporary and certain goodness in this and future lives throughout the four seasons in the fertile field that gives rise to all temporary happiness and certain goodness in this and future lives – but you till this field with the plough of faith.*

Hence it is important to understand that an ordinary fertile field is limited in that one can only plant certain seeds at specific times, and only yield a limited amount of grains, etc. However, the fertile field of the Three Jewels is free from such limitations, for in dependence on it we can plant the seeds for both limitless mundane and supramundane happiness and well-being. Also, we are not restricted by certain seasons but can accumulate the seeds of merit at all times, even while we are asleep. Therefore, since we do not know how much longer we still have this precious human body, there is no excuse not to practice at all times!

Matrceta elaborates on the quote of the Sutra in his ***In Praise of One Worthy of Praise***:

*No field of merit like you  
Exists in the three worlds  
You are the supreme recipient of gifts  
The pure one who purifies a row of monks.*

*Just as the height and breadth  
Of the sky has no limit  
There is no limit to the fruition  
Of helping or harming you.*

This means that it is impossible to find a merit field in the three realms (the desire, form- and formless realms) that is more precious and supreme than the Three Jewels, since as the recipients of gifts the Three Jewels provide the giver with the greatest stores of merit. They are so pure and powerful that they purify the minds of monks and nuns who are the field of merit of lay people and who traditionally sit in rows to accept the offerings made to them.

Furthermore, just as the sky is limitless with respect to its height and breadth, likewise the results of positive or negative actions directed toward the Three Jewels are limitless. Hence, being such a potent merit field, it is essential not to harbour any harmful thoughts towards Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Lamas, and so forth, and to utilize their presence for our accumulation of merit.

Matrceta also says:

*By depending on you  
My mind, though weak, has broadened  
Like a river in the rainy season  
Attaining great skill in composing poetry.*

When we initially start to practice the Dharma our qualities are limited and we face a lot of difficulties to control our afflictions. At that time our mind is like a narrow stream, easily influenced by what comes its way, lacking willpower and control. But gradually by taking refuge in and making offerings to the Three Jewels, our mind becomes vaster and more flexible; it becomes like a strong river that is filled by the monsoon rains. We are able to reduce negative habits more easily and replace them with positive qualities. Matrceta says that by relying on the Three Jewels he became more skilled in composing poetry which is an important skill for writing commentaries on the Dharma.

Therefore, by relying on the Three Jewels we accumulate great merit which in turn serves as the fuel for developing our mind. Before we know it we possess qualities that we did not think we could ever acquire.

Furthermore, every time we face obstacles in our spiritual progress – when we have difficulty listening to teachings or study, when we are unable to grasp the meaning of the words, when we try to meditate but feel restless and unable to concentrate – we should make an effort to accumulate merit by depending on the merit field of the Three Jewels.

